

INSIDE: The Death of Romance, by Allan Bloom

Detroit Free Press Magazine

JUNE 27, 1993

RIVETHEAD

ROCKS

AGAIN

By
Ben Hamper

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Upfront

WHEN WE LAST LOOKED IN ON Ben Hamper, he was fidgeting uncomfortably in the booth of an overpriced London pub while a British talk show host plied him with questions about the American Blue-Collar Experience.

This would have been 1991. Michigan's most celebrated literary figure was in the midst of an international tour to promote "Rivethhead," his improbably popular memoir of life on the assembly line at Flint's GM Bus and Truck Plant, and if I recall correctly, the talk-show host turned out to be Sigmund Freud's granddaughter.

But if you know Hamper, that would hardly surprise you. For the Rivethhead, life just keeps getting weirder.

In a country that has conferred star status on everything from purple dinosaurs to poison-bearing pathologists, there may be no more unlikely celebrity than Ben Hamper. Certainly no law-abiding man is so ill at ease with his fame as Hamper, who became a reluctant spokesman for Blue Collar America almost from the moment he began writing about assembly line life under the Rivethhead pen name in 1986.

So I was not exactly flabbergasted to learn that Hamper thinks it may be time to jettison the nickname that has made him the best-known ex-shoprat in America.

"This whole Rivethhead thing bothers me," he told me a few weeks ago. "I haven't worked in a plant in years now. I mean, what the hell do I know about the assembly line anymore?"

In truth, Hamper has been having a little bit of an identity crisis ever since he returned from his book tour, which he memorialized in the Free Press Magazine last year ("Rivethhead on the Road," June 7, 1992).

"I had never set out to be an author," he wrote then. "I had never envisioned a day when fellow shoprats would stand in line to have me write incredibly maudlin messages on the title page of books. I had never had a game plan, never

had a clue."

Villard Books' current game plan for Hamper is to extract his second book, a diary of the Rivethhead's sporadic meanderings across America, in time for publication sometime in 1994. It's what's known in publishing as high concept. Or, as Hamper might say, imagine Jack Kerouac caught in a turnstile at the Time Warp Bar & Grill.

The book assignment provided the occasion for the adventure Hamper describes in his cover story for today's Free Press Magazine ("Is There Life after Rock & Roll?" page 6). But I don't think he really needed much of an excuse to go rooting around in the netherworld of punk rock.

He may not be up-to-speed on the hairstyles, sartorial rites and argot of the alienated young, but Hamper gravitates to their music instinctively. It's the plaintive anthem of every clueless, pock-faced towhead who doesn't know what he wants to be when he grows up, or even whether growing up is such a good idea in the first place.

Those of us who escaped adolescence before 1980 or so probably will never shave our heads into mohawks, go stage diving or risk bodily harm in the mosh pit at a Screeching Weasels concert. But if the choreography and chord progressions of punk rock seem foreign or even frightening, most of us can remember the youthful anomie that spawned them.

Ben Hamper doesn't just remember; he relates.

Two years after his singular literary talent made him a reluctant voice for the voiceless, he's not sure what to make of himself. A big part of him just wants to melt back into the crowd.

Call it a mid-life crisis; call it arrested adolescence. But don't be too smug about it. Like a lot of middle-aged folk too scared to admit it — maybe like you, Mr. or Ms. Maturity — the Rivethhead is still finding his way.

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middle age to
punk rock6

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Editorial, 222-6559; Advertising, Gail Wysocki, 222-2580; Back Copies, 222-6876. Address all correspondence to Detroit Free Press Magazine, 321 Lafayette Blvd., Detroit 48226



Ben Hamper and the band crammed inside a van they rode together during the east coast tour of Screeching Weasel. Hamper (at center with mustache) is flanked by Richard the Roadie and drummer Dan Panic (at left), and bass player Danny Vapid, lead guitarist John Jughead (in hat) and band leader, vocalist and guitarist Ben Weasel (at right).



IS THERE LIFE AFTER ROCK & ROLL?

By Ben
Hamper

‘YOU MUST BE BEN?” THE young tough in the wool cap and worn leather jacket asks me as I halt in front of the Capitol Cafe on a frigid Friday night in downtown Flint.

“I am if you are,” I reply with a dumb grin.

Ben Weasel, lead singer and governing honcho of the Chicago-based punk rock band known as Screeching Weasel, nods his head and slouches back against a brick wall where an eager clot of adolescent towheads nudge in close for elbow room next to one of the more familiar personages in current punkdom. Weasel (real name Foster) appears totally bored with the attention, preferring to pester me about my tardiness. “So very considerate of you to drop by,” he chides.

“Didn’t you get my message?” I ask. “The promoter was supposed to direct you over to the Torch Bar just down the alley.”

Ben Weasel winces. “I walked through there two hours ago and you were nowhere to be found,” he says. “What an absolutely horrifying place.”

“Bad timing,” I explain. Two hours ago the Torch would’ve still been clogged with all sorts of loud business slobes shedding the work week in Scotch-induced stupors. “It’s all clear now if you’d like to go back over for a beer or a burger,” I say.

Weasel waves me off. “Absolutely horrifying,” he repeats.

“Well, welcome to Flint, Mr. Weasel,” I laugh.

MY FIRST CONTACT WITH BEN WEASEL CAME when I read one of his monthly columns in a magazine

Stage-diving, mosh pits,
and confrontations with
anarchist youth: Welcome
to the glamorous life of
Screeching Weasel.

called Maximum Rock N Roll, the holy writ of punk rock. In a January column, Weasel asked readers to contact him if they knew where he might find Ben Hamper, who he mentioned had been featured in the movie “Roger & Me” and had written a book called “Rivethhead.” Figuring that I had as much knowledge as anyone on this matter, I trudged off to the phone.

We wound up babbling for an hour or so. I found Ben Weasel to be very personable, quick-on-the-droll,

PHOTOGRAPH — PAULINE LUBENS



Screeching Weasel on stage: Ben Weasel (left), John Jughead and Danny Vapid.

and as contentiously opinionated as Rush Limbaugh at a John Hinkley Jr. parole hearing.

I learned that we had many things in common, the most curious being a stress disorder known as agoraphobia. We were even being prescribed the same medication, a relatively potent sedative called Klonopin. Ben confided that he was hoping the drug would keep him calm during Screeching Weasel's upcoming spring tour.

Right then, an idea struck me. Seeing as how I was currently consigned by a major publishing firm to deliver a second book — an account, ironically, of one man's tremulous meanderings across America — why not join up with the Screeching Weasel tour and drag my notebook along on a punk rock junket?

The more I thought about it, the more I liked the idea: Balding doofus whisked into the

swirling vortex of an adolescent music form that still clung to his heart like Kool-Aid stains to a codger's lip. One graybeard's valiant last stand against the hopeless encroachment of middle age.

Ben liked it, too, though he was quick to remind me that a Screeching Weasel tour was devoid of any form of glamour, unless you were partial to snoozing on floors and being crammed like cattle into a creaky van full of fatigued wisenheimers.

In deference to me, he decided to switch the first tour date from Battle Creek to Flint.

He'd been curious about my hometown ever since viewing "Roger & Me." He even asked me if Rhonda Britton, the movie's notorious "Bunny Lady," ever attended any Flint punk shows.

"No," I answered, "but it's not the least bit uncommon to see

Michael Moore and Roger Smith dueling in the mosh pit on any given weekend."

"Hamper?" Mr. Weasel groaned. "Shut up."

Is There Life After Rock & Roll?

THE BILL FOR THE FLINT show was a good one. The Rugby Mothers, a rambunctious trio from Bay City, opened with their customary brand of bop-crazed hardcore. The show also featured Flint's Guilty By-standers, an endearing five-

piece best known for their ability to meld musical apathy into comic triumph.

Two members of this band still carry around the onus of having been key players in my short-lived foray into the area punk scene via a mid-'80s noise ensemble known variously as Dr. Schwartz Kult, the Lousy Catholics and Puppets Under Smitty. Still, I somehow manage to resist lumbering up on stage when they suddenly unleash the old Hamper-penned spiritual, "Bowling for Teenagers." Oh, the wretched passage of youth so fleeting!

The moment Screeching Weasel begins, it's apparent that these fellers are playing for keeps. Without so much as a perfunctory nod to the crowd, they leap into high gear with their infectious blend of strident pop and seething punk whooshing through the darkened cafe like a cyclone careening down an alleyway.

Ben Weasel is unquestionably Screeching Weasel's focal point. Muscular and rigid, he bashes out jolting bar chords while barking into his mike in an open-legged stance that recalls a bayonet-wielding soldier from a kid's army man collection. How he intends to keep

this up for the next two months is a giant mystery to me.

For all the hubbub, the crowd remains strangely stoic. They seem to

be waiting for some cue. Just as I'm about to condemn them all as enfeebled mommy-twits, they burst into motion as the band cranks up "Cindy's On Methadone," a punk number that sounds like a Monkees tune being ripped apart at the seams and set afire.

A section opens up in the middle of the crowd for the slam-

dancers. They smash into one another and hurl themselves to and fro like catapulted dummies. To the unaware, this form of frantic release might seem like a vast and violent melee. But there is no more malice involved in slam-dancing (also known as moshing) than in yesteryear's Watusi.

After the show, Ben introduces me to the rest of the band — Danny Vapid, John Jughead, and Dan Panic. (You were expecting Jefferson, Lincoln and Taft?) I also meet Richard, the band's subdued road manager, a.k.a. Richard the Roadie. There's little time to chat, as the band must hustle off for tomorrow night's show in Toronto. I'll hook up with them the following week for the eastern leg of their tour.

Just before they depart, I pull Ben Weasel aside and ask him awkwardly if he would consider fashioning me a punk rock for use when we meet up in New Jersey. Something like Bernie Out, maybe, or Duff Geezer.

"Hamper?" Mr. Weasel groans.

"I know, I know. Shut up!"

A WEEK LATER, I ARRIVE AT a club in Hoboken called Maxwell's. The place looks more like a softball bar than a popular punk haven. I find the Weasels devouring large plates of vegetarian pasta in a booth near the back. They describe the previous night's treacherous 14-hour van ride from New Britain, Conn., as they engaged the Blizzard of the Century with a nonfunctioning set of windshield wipers. "You'd have loved it, Hamper," Ben Weasel grins.

We move to the back room of the bar, where the opening band is playing. What a weird scene this is: while the band grinds through some rather sluggish raunch 'n' roll, a lanky guy teeters around atop a milk crate center-stage. He doesn't sing or play an instrument. Apparently,

his only role is to wriggle around on the milk crate, grimacing and contorting himself like an acid casualty being swarmed by bees. I can't even pretend to understand.

By the time Screeching Weasel takes over, the small room is crammed with a boisterous horde of twerpy-something punk zealots decked out in reversed ball caps and button-laden leathers. I wade into their midst feeling every bit of my 37 years. The Weasels blast into their set and I'm temporarily a kid again — bopping steadily, tilting with the tide and shouting along on the chorus parts.

This changes quickly as the band launches into their third tune, a song appropriately entitled "Teenage Freakshow." The crowd behind me suddenly rushes the stage, and my arm is nearly

separated by one enormous oaf who slams through me as if I were a bed sheet on a clothes line. I retreat to the back of the room.

The highlight of the show comes when an acrobatic stage-diver soars so high through the air that he actually smacks into a cheap chandelier which rains a cloud of dust down on the crowd. No harm, no foul. The kid quickly clambers back on stage for another plunge.

As one who has involved himself in such shenanigans, I can attest that stage-diving can be glorious fun. It can also be one helluva risk. Once airborne, the diver is at the mercy of the crowd. It is essential that the crowd organize itself and pull together in an effort to buffer the descent of all incoming stage-divers. The last thing you want to see as a human projectile is a landing area devoid of awaiting arms. Concussions and busted limbs have a way of

putting a huge damper on that old punk rock spirit.

The Weasels play their customary 35-minute set — 12 zip-gun standards plus two encore tunes. As Ben Weasel had asserted before the show, there's simply no excuse for a band to drag on any

up last night's revenue. "How'd we do?" he asks.

"Six hundred and change," Jughead answers.

"Let's find a bank, mail home a money order, and get the hell outta here."

Things settle down as we finally reach the interstate. Ben busies himself writing letters and memos. Jughead and Panic catch some sleep. Vapid curls up in the crawl space with a Charles Bukowski novel. I chain-smoke, chew down Roloids and stare out the window.

On arrival in Boston, we pile out in front of this evening's venue, an East Indian restaurant that houses a junky little punk club. The Weasels are famished and move into the restaurant to order their complimentary

meals. No big fan of Indian cuisine, I wander next door to a bar.

Upon returning, I spot the Weasels grouped around the stage chatting with four older guys. Ben motions me over for introductions. "These are the Queers," he tells me. "They will be playing with us tonight and in Philly tomorrow."

We all shake hands. They seem like normal middle-agers. One guy has a large pot belly, one is balding rapidly, and the tallest one looks like a sloppy version of Graham Nash. "Pleased to meet someone who's old enough to remember Woodstock and Nehru jackets," I say as I shake the hand of Joe King, the band's singer.

The club is hopelessly packed as the Queers begin their set. They dole out happy-go-loopy chuckle-bombs on the order of "Hi Mom, It's Me," "Murder in the Brady House," and the sportive anthem, "I Hate Every-

thing" (Inspirational passage: *I hate working around the house/I hate mowing the lawn/I hate doing my homework/I even hate this song!*).

Before Screeching Weasel goes on, I ask Ben if it would be all right if I took in the band's set from a spot on stage. I'm curious to see just what all this mayhem looks like from the band's perspective. Weasel tells me to wedge in beside Panic's drum kit.

He strikes into the first tune and the place goes berserk. The crowd looks like one massive ant farm under siege. Bodies collide everywhere in a colossal free-for-all, and the meek are being trampled. Some of the more belligerent morons are creating macho havoc at the edge of the stage, and Richard has his hands full trying to protect Ben and Vapid from having their mike stands rammed down their throats. One lunkhead with several tattoos stations himself right up front and does nothing but scream obscenities.

We depart on the long trip back to New Jersey. The Weasel-mobile is as frigid as a meat locker and sleep is impossible for everyone with the exception of Vapid, who snores like a drugged mule from the depths of a crawl

space.

Ben Weasel is even more manic than usual, alternately fuming about having to play venues that serve alcohol and wondering aloud why all the females in the crowd tend to flock around someone as disposable as Dan Panic, the band's drummer.

At 22, Panic is the youngest member of the band and the latest addition to the revolving lineup of Screeching Weasel. He is also the only guy in the group who holds an outside job, working in the produce section of a large supermarket. The others, all bachelors like Panic, manage to scrape by on tour earnings and royalties from the sale of the band's four records. None of them seems on the verge of escaping the poverty level, a condition that doesn't appear to concern them as long as the band continues to gain wider recognition.

The Weasels formed in 1986 after Ben got a job at a movie theater where he met up with John Jughead. Now 25 and 26 respectively, they are the only holdovers from the original band. (Danny Vapid, 23, joined up in 1989 as a replacement for the departing Dave Naked.)

It's clear that Weasel's role stretches far beyond singer and second guitar. Out here

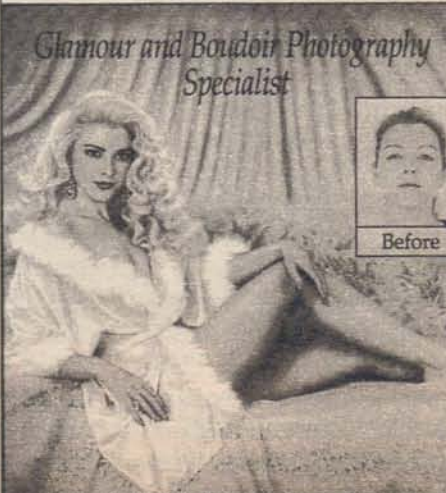
The last thing you want to see as a stage diver is a landing area devoid of awaiting arms.

longer than 40 minutes. Watching the crowd file out, it's evident that his claim is accurate. The kids are both satiated and saturated. All of this having been accomplished in roughly the same amount of time U2 or Van Halen would've needed just to hike up their leotards and huddle with their hairdressers.

THE NEXT MORNING, BEN Weasel calls up to my hotel room and leads me out to the Weasel-mobile, a dingy 1983 Dodge Econoline van that will serve as my home base for the next week.

As I plop on an old sofa in the middle of the van, it's obvious Ben Weasel is not in the best of moods. He orders Richard into the driver's seat and begins ranting obscenities at nearby motorists snagged in the Manhattan traffic. Getting nowhere with that, he twists around from his shotgun seat and confers with Jughead, who is in the process of talking

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Is There Life After Rock & Roll

on tour, he's equal parts Ward Cleaver, George Patton and Henny Youngman. He likes to depict the band as a strictly autonomous union of chums, but without him it's clear Screeching Weasel would quickly screech to a halt.

The afternoon after the Boston gig we tumble out in Philadelphia in front of a large club called Dobb's. Richard unloads the equipment at breakneck speed as the relieved promoter practically flounders to his knees and kisses the band's feet.

Too fatigued to jostle around with a frenzied bunch of under-agers, I retire upstairs to a bar with a wide-screen TV that beams out the band's set. I'm joined by Joe King of the Queens, and I take the opportunity to ask him what an aging restaurateur from a small town in New Hampshire is doing immersed in such a youth-oriented music scene.

"Who wants to grow up?" he answers. "Punk rock is like going to the circus to watch all the clowns. There's the attraction of going out to the garage, making a lot of noise, and riling your parents. Though we're older now, we still enjoy that."

The next morning, we drive to Baltimore, where the Weasels are booked for another all-ages matinee show. From the moment we arrive in front of the venue (actually, nothing more than a cavernous abandoned warehouse in the slums), I'm filled with fear and apprehension. The location is bad enough, but the real cause of my uneasiness is the crowd filing into the building. The majority look like violent throwbacks to a bygone era where the term "punk-rocker" was just a euphemism for "cretinous thug."

Ben Weasel is no less discouraged. "It's as if every Sid Vicious clone in the state has crawled out from under a rock," he moans.

To Ben's further annoyance, most of these skinheads are drunk on arrival for a show that was promoted as a strictly booze-free event. All we can do is buckle in for a bumpy ride.

Before Screeching Weasel goes on, Ben asks if I might man the merchandise table, freeing Richard the Roadie to protect the stage. I take my place in back next to a group of scrubby punks from the Anarchist Youth Federation who are busy peddling all kinds of ridiculous pam-



He's with the band: Ben Hamper heads away from the club J.C. Dobbs in Philadelphia after a performance by Screeching Weasel.

phlets and flyers condemning the sorry American way. It's pathetic. Most of these ideological low-brows probably car-pooled in from the suburbs in their mommy's station wagons.

The band has hardly begun when I hear Ben Weasel halt the show. An idiot up front has just splattered him with a mouthful of beer, and Ben's attempting to track the guy down. Failing at that, Weasel gets into a heckling match with a bunch of bozos in mohawk hairdos who seem to believe it's their right to spit beer on whom ever they choose. Things only degenerate from that point on, and Screeching Weasel rushes through an abbreviated set before hustling off stage. Tension and bad vibrations clog the room as Weasel tells me to pack up the merchandise. It's obviously time to bail.

By the time we get everything back in the van, an ugly throng has encircled the Weasel-mobile. If it were up to me, I'd plow right through their midst while tearing toward the first expressway ramp. But it's not my call, so all I can do is squirm in the driver's seat of the van while Ben Weasel squats on the hood in front of me and begins badgering this churlish mob. He may be outnumbered, but he's sure not outwitted.

"Punk rock is like going to the circus to watch all the clowns."

Locating the crud who spit beer on him, Weasel immediately challenges the guy to repeat the act. "C'mon, tough guy, show all your friends what a hard-ass you are. Obviously, you've got all your macho buddies to back you up. So what's the problem, tough guy?"

Nothing like a public undressing to expose a

milkstop. The guy fades back into the crowd muttering something about how he didn't intend any harm. Within minutes, the mob begins to disperse down the block. I loosen the grip I've been holding on the wrench at my side and breathe a sigh of relief as Weasel converses with a group of the more level-headed punks.

"I'm not into cheap shots," he tells them. "I certainly didn't come all the way to Baltimore to be spit on. We had that same stupid drunken mentality in our town until we banded together and kicked those morons out of the scene. They back down fast when challenged."

Back in the van, I compliment Ben on his gutsy oratorical intervention. I have to hand it to him for keeping his cool. Had that been me out there, I tell him, I'd have lost control and beat each and every one of those hairless goomers totally senseless. My macho pose makes a big impression on the band, which dissolves in laughter.

THE KING'S HEAD INN IN NORFOLK, Va., is safe turf, a smoothly-run rock 'n' roll club with a friendly staff of doormen and barmaids. Even the bouncers seem pleasant. It's obvious that the violent ambience of the dreaded Baltimore show will not repeat itself tonight.

While Ben Weasel disappears into the night for his pre-show solitude, I grab Vapid and we belly up to the bar. The band is allowed 12 free beers, and since Vapid is the only member who drinks (Ben holds him to a two-beer maximum before playing), I'm allowed to drink up as much of the remaining surplus as I wish. I can live with such perks.

The promoter joins us at the bar. He already seems to know Vapid and shakes his hand. I decide to provide my own introduction. "So nice to meet you," I say, extending my hand. "I'm Danny's father." "Well, it's certainly a pleasure to meet you, Mister, um..." "Vapid," I answer.

Screeching Weasel sounds great this evening. The crowd is very active but well-behaved. I stand along the fringe of the mosh pit and sing my lungs out on the soaring chorus breaks. By this point in the tour, I feel a deep kinship

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with the band, a bond that transcends my initial role as tag-along hack.

Standing around after the show, the promoter pays the band and remarks to Ben how nice it is that Mr. Vapid is so supportive of his son's musical endeavors that he even takes time out to tour with the group. Ben Weasel smiles and shrugs. "Thankfully, Mr. Vapid keeps me in line," he says.

The nine-hour ride to South Carolina is a miserable trek. The van is so cold that you can actually trace your breath. Sleep deprivation is taking its toll as everyone bickers over custody of the crawl space, the only spot in the van where one can sprawl out and begin to thaw. We decide to rotate in three-hour shifts. When my turn arrives, it's already daylight. Though I can't manage to fall asleep, I'm at least able to keep warm.

We finally roll into the tiny burg of Inman, S.C., and Richard halts the van in front of a large immaculate two-story house. Some perky-looking teenager who looks like a refugee from the set of "Growing Pains" trots down the driveway to greet us.

"Hi, I'm Jason," the kid says. "Welcome to Inman."

As it turns out, Jason is promoting tonight's Screeching Weasel show at his mother's

place of business — the Wee Care Day Care Center. I am not making this up. He leads us into his home as Ben tells him that we all need sleep. Jason scatters us around and I wind up in his little brother's bedroom surrounded by gumball machines, autographed baseballs and framed cartoon characters. Unable to sleep due to this increasing fear that Aunt Bea might barge through the door at any given moment to scold me for bedding down with my socks on, I join Jason downstairs to watch game shows and wait for the others to awaken.

We arrive early at the day care center to help Jason and his mom stow away all the toys, books, board games and plastic kiddie furniture. While Ben and Richard leave to fetch a few pizzas, I stare on as Panic and Vapid furiously piece together a mammoth puzzle of teen idol Luke Perry. I can't help but wonder what those fascist boneheads from the Anarchist Youth Federation back in Baltimore might think of this preposterously wholesome scene.

Despite a torrential hail storm, nearly 100 mannerly teens make it to the show.

They sit cross-legged in perfect rows on the checkered carpet, applauding in almost rever-

ential fashion after each song. It's easy to see that big-league punkorama doesn't come their way often. It's a certain bet that Jason's gonna be Big Twig On Campus for as

ningham household is taken over by a popular doo-wop band that takes full advantage of the run of the roost. Art imitating life over and over and over.

THE NEXT AFTERNOON while driving to Charlotte, N.C., Ben orders Richard to pull off the interstate in order to go browsing at one of those cheesy roadside T-shirt emporiums. I have no idea what Weasel could possibly be in the market for.

Ten minutes later, he hops back into the van and shows us what he's purchased. He slaps a bright red ball cap on his head that reads "USA American & Proud." He hangs a heart-shaped air freshener that says, "I Love Jesus" from the rearview mirror. He then presents a trio of bumper stickers which proclaim: "Welcome Our Troops Back Home," "Made in America," and "These Colors Never Run."

"Considering our locale, I figured some patriotic emblems might save our necks."

Perhaps there is some real sense to Weasel's logic. God knows if we were pulled over in this bumpkin belt for any minor violation there would likely be

little mercy paid to a sloven punk rock entourage with Yankee plates. Besides a lengthy detention and a complete body cavity search, we'd probably find ourselves bunched in some hasty police lineup for crimes that had not yet been committed.

TONIGHT'S VENUE IS A club called Milestones, a squalid dungeon splattered with wall-to-wall graffiti and the scent of stale booze. After a particularly awful opening act, the Weasels send the packed house into a total frenzy the moment they begin. For the most part, it's an older crowd, and the majority seem heavily snookered as they collide in a turbulent scrum. If you were to engage in this kind of hit-and-run on a public street, the chances are good that you'd be clubbed into submission, hauled away, fingerprinted, and brought up on charges of aggravated assault. How it is that not a single yahoo becomes agitated enough to throw a punch is a real perplexity.

Though the crowd pleads for more, I'm not surprised in the least when Ben Weasel jumps offstage and refuses to play an encore. His disdain for drunkards is almost as hard-line as his unyielding revulsion toward pot-smokers.

Eventually, he sits down next to Vapid and me, orders a soda, and broods silently. A steady stream of fans approach him, but he either ignores them entirely or brusquely tells them to beat it. We are quickly ordered into the van.

Having had a snootful myself, I confront Ben regarding his churlish demeanor with the group's

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long as he chooses to flaunt the title.

It's after midnight when we arrive back at Jason's house. His mom invites us to spend the night and begins cooking up a huge meal of scrambled eggs, sausage and homemade biscuits. We are offered warm showers and clean towels. Ben uses the phone to call his girlfriend and half of America. I stomp Vapid and Jughead at pool before heading off for blessed slumber.

Sprawled in a warm bed, I can't help but chuckle to myself. I'm recalling an old episode of "Happy Days" in which the Cun-

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WASHTENAW COUNTY				
Aunt Agatha's	213 S. Forth Ave.	Ann Arbor	769-1114	Mystery/True Crime

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Is There Life After Rock & Roll

CONT. FROM P. 12

fans. I contend that not everyone operates under his stringent code of ethics. After all, wasn't punk rock largely based on the idea of individualized expression?

"You're a damn celebrity to many of these people," I say. "They buy your music. Just because they may lack certain verbal skills is no reason to treat them with such sullen contempt."

"Richard, pull the van over," Weasel says. "I want a piece of Mr. Congeniality."

"Let's do it," I laugh. "Perhaps a thorough butt-stomping will help straighten out your act, you overweening juvenile delinquent."

Richard shakes his head and we drive on toward Columbia, S.C. Everything is entirely still outside of the purr of the engine and Vapid's unremitting snore.

We arrive to an overflow crowd in front of a club called Rockafellas. Since it's my last stop on the tour, Ben pulls me aside and asks if I'd care to try "stage-goofing" for the band tonight — securing the stage, fending off the morons, and seeing that no harm comes to the lead singer.

"It might provide you with some interesting material," he says.

"It might provide me with a splintered skull," I reply. "Couldn't I just stand somewhere on stage and rattle a tambourine like that fat guy in the Turtles?"

"Who the hell are the Turtles?" Weasel asks.

"Well, back in the mid-'60s, I had a string of... aw, forget it."

My decision to pass on the stage-goof offer turns out to be a wise one.

Despite large signs on both sides of the stage stating "No Stage Diving" (a legal formality), the kids lunge one after another

like paratroopers funneling out of a burning DC-3. Richard sweats profusely as he hastens back and forth along the front of the stage, attempting to push the dawdlers back into the crowd and keep Ben from being swarmed and mangled.

Things eventually become so frenetic that the promoter asks Screeching Weasel to halt the show for a moment while he makes an impassioned little plea for everyone to cool down.

Due to the overabundance of stage-divers, there are injuries taking place up front. "Come on, kids," he appeals like some old hippie, "take care of your brothers. Let's have fun, but please remember to catch the stage-divers!"

Perhaps someone forgot to remind him that this isn't Woodstock, this isn't American Bandstand, and most definitely, this ain't the Summer of Love. The kids pick up right where they left off. I suppose they don't call it punk rock for nothing.

After the show, I shake hands with the Weasels and wish them well as they prepare to whisk off for the next town and the next bash-happy swarm of restless tykes.

In a way I'm sad to be jumping ship. For a while there, I almost had myself convinced that I should uncrate my old guitar and call up the old gang when I returned home. Forget the rotten notion that a balding, middle-aged slug with a pot belly and a nerve condition was somehow sentenced to a dull glide towards prune juice, pruning shears and putt-putt golf.

After all, rock 'n' roll never forgets.

Unfortunately, people do. ■

BEN HAMPER, a.k.a. the Riverhead, began writing about life as an autoworker for the *Free Press Magazine* in 1986. His second book, *"America Drinks & Goes Home,"* will be published by *Villard Books* in 1994.

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The Detroit News
Detroit Free Press
CLASSIFIEDS

70 Male Seeking Female

A HANDSOME, tall and trim, SWM, age 33, funny but caring and romantic, seeks pretty, slender woman for companionship and romance. #12426

Attractive SWM (24) Singing Law Student 3 years for romance with SWF (18-24) who is beautiful and fit. #12428

CHARMING SWM — 39, 6'2", handsome, healthy, adventurous, outgoing, seeks nice lady, 28-40 for fun, romance, and companionship. #12307

CHESE PARK — Picnics, dinner cruises, summer fun, SWM, 38, seeking SBF with gray, green or hazel eyes for friendship and good times. #12440

College Educated — SWM, 29, 5'7", intelligent, muscular, creative, sarcastic, seeks kind-of-cute, pretty smart, funny, Italian/white female, 18-35. #12350

CONSIDERATE SW Gentleman 30, financially and emotionally stable seeking attractive SBF between 21 and 35 for dating and possible relationship. #12353

DBCM good looking, 40's, shy, sensitive, financially secure, seeking long term relationship w/female of similar qualities. #12409

DEGREED Single Black male, 46 yrs. old, professionally employed, seeking single female, race no barrier. No games. #12413

Discreet Interracial Relationship Wanted — I am black, 29, handsome; you are 25-35, blond, very pretty. Let's party! #12454

DWM, 26, tall handsome, enjoys outdoor activities, concerts, and is looking for athletic SWF who enjoys the same. #12427

FIT, attractive WM, 37, nice guy with heart and integrity, seeks romance and commitment with available petite WF under 40. W. Wayne. No smokers. #12366

Good conversationalist sought by handsome imaginative, sensual white male, 41, for long, intimate imaginative sexy phone conversations. #12457

GOOD LOOKING SWM, 34 — looking for SWF. Prefer no children, with weight in proportion to height, under 30, for friendship. #12438

Nice Looking Single black male, professional wishes to meet attractive woman 22 to 40, any race. Kids OK. #12431

NICE single black male, age 36, medium build, 5'11" tall, looking for that special friend, 30-37, who enjoys jazz, dining, movies and quiet evenings. #12421

OUTGOING SWM, 35, looking for honest, outgoing, energetic SWF, 35-45 to share what life has to offer, for friendship and romance. #12338

SBM — 25, handsome w/light brown eyes, living in Ypsilanti area. Seeking well-shaped, employed woman for serious relationship. #12459

SBM, 23, seeking affectionate petite SWF 18 to 40 for relationship. Must enjoy bowling, amusement parks and walks on the beach. #12387

SM seeking SF between ages 18-21 who's looking for a tall, dark skinned male, age 19. #12464

SBM, 29, never married, no children, wishes to meet a true lady for friendship and romance. #12369

SWM, 25, financially independent seeking SF, proportioned appropriately, to spoil and entertain. Race/age no barrier. All calls will be answered. #12473

SWM, 29, 5'8", 170 lbs., sort of handsome, sort of cute. Seeks small female, children no problem. My second ad - still no calls. #12433

SWM, nice looking, 40, tall, slender, nice qualities. Seeks SBF, good sense of humor, fun, very affectionate for a monogamous relationship. #12461

SWM, 6'3", 38 yrs., average person, honest, sincere, caring, understanding. Interests: dining in-out, garage sales, seeks SWF, 30-40. Dearborn Hts. #12397

VEGETARIAN BM Praying for Vegetarian BF who does not need money because she has everything but love! God! Peace! Respect! #12424

WELL GROOMED — black male, age 38, 6'1", 219 lbs., seeks nice single BF, 5'3"-5'11", 125-225 lbs., between 28-45, for friendship, fun and romance. #12436

Young, attractive SBF from Brooklyn, NYC looking for SBF, light skinned, 20 to 21 from Detroit, Michigan. Peace! #12392

71 Female Seeking Male

ARE there any good men left? If so, this SBF, mid 30's, 5'4", 135 lbs., wants to hear from you. Seeking tall attractive male, 30-45, who is serious. #12463

A SWF, 26, 5'5", seeks attractive man 26-32 who enjoys dancing, movies, traveling, variety of music and outdoor sports plus a 4 year old boy. #12356

ATTENTION: SBF, 22, 5'11", professional going sister, seeks SBF with own job and security for possible relationship. #12376

ATTRACTIVE SBF, 27, professional, 5', 150 lbs., no children, brown complexion, sense of humor, down-to-earth w/common sense, intelligent and degreed. Enjoys basketball, boxing, plays, concerts, dinner and dancing. Wishes to meet handsome SB gentleman, 24-36, 5'10" or taller, medium build, educated, goal oriented professional for friendship, possibly more, incarcerated, drug-users, married, bl's, gays, save \$2 and don't call. #12378

CLASSY SWF, slightly vulnerable redhead. Attractive, adventurous, sexy, sensual, electric personality. Seeks tall, reliable, affluent, intelligent gentleman 40-50 who will treat a lady with class and style. #12448

DBF — 31 SEEKING SINGLE BM, 31 to 41 for companionship love, honesty and to serve God. #12467

DWF looking for a real cowboy! If you are an outgoing handsome boot scooter, call me, I like cowboy hats and long, lean Rodeos and Coors Light and sand in my shoes, kids, mushroom hunting, canoeing. #12364

LONELY LADY BLUE, alone again, he said "I'm too nice, go figure. Looking for a replacement, now taking applications. #12429

SBF, age 39, 125 lbs., 5'4", I would like to meet a down-to-earth SBF that likes dining out, movies and church. If you're interested call me. #12354

SBF 40 — attractive, sexy, medical professional, 5'4, 140 lbs, seeks SBF 35-40, tall, medium build, attractive and employed. Must like dancing, going out and walk beach the stars. Must be romantic, serious calls only and no married men. #12407

SBF, 22, full-figured, employed, seeking SBF, 22-27, 5'8-6", employed, 150-220 lbs., honest, fun-loving, adventurous. Likes going to movies, out to dinner. #12367

SBF — 39, 5'8", 185, professional, loves dining out, theatre, most music. Seeking prof. SWM, over 30 for serious romance. No games please. #12358

SBF 21, 5'6", queen sz. single parent, seeks SBF for romance and possible relationship. #12390

SBF, 23, seeks SBF age 23-28 for friendship, possible relationship. #12377

SCBF, attractive, intelligent. Varied interests. Seeks 35-45 yr. old SB gentleman, who loves talks, movies, looking for an exclusive long-term relationship. #12351

SEPARATED — Italian WF, 26, queen size, dresses nice and attractive, business owner, seeking non-smoking SWM, 28-35 for relationship. #12349

SERIOUS? I am a VERY ATTRACTIVE, SWF, tall, slim, 30, never married, who is interested in meeting a traditional, family-oriented SWM who is handsome, tall (over 6') and a very good person. Please leave a descriptive message. #12388

SWF, 28 yrs. old, brown hair, brown eyes, Italian seeks attractive male for companionship, maybe even a serious relationship. I am 5'5", 190 lbs. If interested please call #12471

TALL, SLIM BLOND, Attractive, DWF, 43, likes music, sports, good conversation, good times. Are you a tall, attractive, successful, humorous NICE guy, late 30's to early 40's? Friends list! #12393

SEXY, BRAINY — non-smoking, drug-free, highly educated, sophisticated DBF, 5'8 1/2", 150 lbs., 30-something, who's sensitive, warm, emotionally secure and compassionate, enjoys all kinds of music and fine cuisine. Would like to meet an emotionally secure, classy, college educated, professionally employed, non-smoking, drug-free, Christian WM between the ages of 30-45 (who have dated in the past or have been married to a BF). Men who are bald or wear false teeth, do not reply. #12339

SPECIAL PERSON WANTED — SBF seeking independent working man. Non-smoker. Own home. Last chance! #12400

SWF - 30, 5'240, hairy, intelligent, anxieties, wishes romance, affection, not sex. Seeks SWM attractive, under 35, (distance matters) Warren. #12399

YOUNG, very attractive, black female, looking for a wealthy man to show me the finer things in life. #12286

72 Male Seeking Male

GBM, single parent, 31, 6', 180 lbs., looking for my knight in shining armor. #12365

BI WM, 44, 5'10", 185, grey/brown hair, masculine, nice looking, professional. Likes the arts, the outdoors, travel, antique shops, documentaries. #12394

GWM, seeks GM for housemate and companionship. Also persons interested in trading videos. Southwest Wayne County. #12363

YOUNG GBM, 5'10", 130 lbs., seeking masculine GBM, 18-30 for possible relationship. #12408

73 Female Seeking Female

ATTRACTIVE WHITE FEMALE Seeking an attractive white female for friendship or maybe more. No studs. #12362

FEMALE SEEKING FEMALE Attractive, MBF, seeking female for friendship, companionship, possible relationship. #12411

GBF — Seeking feminine GF who is caring, sincere, sensitive, dependable for a one on one down to earth relationship. #12412

Hello, My Name is Toni, I'm seeking a female for friendship, discreet relationship. All calls returned. #12366

BLACK Female seeking experienced mature female for friendship and fun. #12355

SEXY White Female 26, 5'9" 130 lbs. seeks clean, attractive female age 21-30 for fun and friendship. #12439

SEXY WHITE LADY 27, 5'5, 119 lbs, seeks curious white lady, to explore passionate friendship and new experiences. #12449

SINGLE, very attractive, white female seeking a single attractive WF for friendship or maybe more. No married women. Feminine women only. #12383

YOUNG, very attractive, slim, curious, female looking for a special friend to show me the finer things in life. I spoil me. Race no barrier. #12284

77 Alternative

ATTRACTIVE, single bi-sexual fem, age 20, seeking attractive white female for fulfilling friendship and sensual relationship. Discretion assured. #12474

NUDIST COUPLE Happily married, trim, attractive WC nudists seeks similar WC 21-35 to enjoy both clothed/nude activities with. #12357